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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 LAGOS 000605

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SUBJECT: A POLITICAL NOVICE TAKES OVER IN ENUGU STATE

REF: LAGOS 222

Classified By: Acting Consul General Donald McConnell for reasons 1.4 (B) and (D)

11. (C) Summary: Enugu state has continued to live up to its reputation for political intrigue. After an election fraught with violence and controversy, newly-inaugurated Enugu State People's Democratic Party (PDP) Governor Sullivan Chime distanced himself from his political patron, former Governor Chimaroke Nnamani, as well as Nnamani's brutal Ebeano faction. Nnamani's arrest by the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) on charges of corruption has crippled Ebeano, but Chime faces election tribunal challenges and Nnamani may be ready to join with the opposition to oust Chime. End summary.

Visit to the Enugu State Governor

12. (U) On August 1, Pol-Econ chief visited Enugu State Governor Sullivan Chime at the state guest house. Chime, tall and in his forties, appeared preoccupied during the brief visit but did speak of the opportunity for closer relations with the United States. Chime did inform Pol-Econ chief he had never visited the United States, which contrasted with former Governor Nnamani, who lived many years there.

Governor Chime Disavows Ebeano

13. (C) Osita Ogbu, Executive Director for the Centre for the Advancement of Democracy and Rule of Law, described to Poloff the changing political landscape in Enugu. Governor Sullivan Chime has ended state support and disavowed any connection to Ebeano, the political force loyal to former Governor Chimaroke Nnamani. According to Ogbu, while Chime was Enugu State Attorney General, gangs supported by Ebeano assaulted and stripped him, and Chime had borne the memory of this indignity ever since.

14. (C) Nnamani has suffered his own problems. The Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) leveled a 105-count charge on Nnamani and arraigned the former Governor in the Lagos High Court. After Chime disavowed his connections with Ebeano, Ogbu said, the former Governor had been working to

remove his would-be protege, including by surreptitiously supporting the opposition's efforts at the tribunal. EFCC Chairman Nuhu Ribadu had acted on his own in arresting former governors, Ogbu postulated, as President Yar'Adua supported a prosecution but light punishment of the former governors. The recent plea bargain with former Baylesa Governor Diepreye Alamieyeseigha showed Ribadu obeyed Yar'Adua's wishes and settled for a light sentence.

15. (C) Chime's surprising rejection of the unpopular Nnamani had been an "accidental positive", said Ogbu, and had enhanced Chime's standing in the state. Since becoming Governor, Chime had raised civil servant salaries and hired professionals to work in his administration. Former Senate President Ken Nnamani has stayed close to Chime and become an advisor, Ogbu noted, seeing in Chime an opportunity to regain prominence after his ostracism by the PDP.

Tribunals in Enugu Stymied

16. (C) The tribunals have gotten underway in Enugu, and as in other states the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) has made every effort to delay its progress, often with the support of the PDP. Chime had appointed the Enugu State INEC commissioner's brother, Ogbu told Poloff, and government at all levels had poured resources into the tribunals. Since the 2006 Electoral Act allowed candidates but not communities to petition the tribunal, the state government had heavily pressured opposition candidates with political favors and thinly-veiled threats to withdraw, said Ogbu. While it was too early to predict how the tribunals would decide, the previously despairing Ogbu remained

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optimistic and related to Poloff that earlier the Court of Appeals had informed the tribunals this was not "business as usual".

PPA, but Not APGA, Would Join a Unity Government

17. (C) Enugu All Progressives Grand Alliance (APGA) Chairman Okechukwu Nkoloagu told Poloff his party had a good chance before the electoral tribunals, and thought the tribunals were trying to correct the flawed April elections. Nkoloagu said APGA would not join a proposed unity government, so President Yar'Adua did not bother to invite them. Nkoloagu bristled at the argument the opposition's own division helped the PDP. The divide in the opposition did not result in defeat, Nkoloagu asserted, rather it was the PDP's control of the army, INEC, police, and ruling apparatus. In Enugu, "if you wanted to vote for the opposition you were taken out", Nkoloagu declared. There would be no free and fair elections without a truly independent INEC, as the tribunals were not a long-term solution. However, Chime was an improvement over Nnamani, Nkoloagu said. Enugu People's Progressive Alliance Chairman Chief Okafor concurred and told Poloff that Chime could not have won a free and fair election. However, the PPA would join a government of national unity and would not take its case to tribunal, despite what he called a "terrible election" in Enugu.

Comment

18. (C) With a fractured and weak opposition unlikely to contest the tribunal effectively, the real contest appears to be between Chime and his former patron Nnamani. Nnamani's possible intervention in the tribunal makes this state a wild card, though his effectiveness will be hampered by his own court troubles. With Nnamani's case in front of the court, his fate may rest on his ability to cut a deal with the EFCC

to leave him relatively unfettered. On this matter Yar'Adua may have a role to play. While Nnamani is unpopular, Chime also lacks a popular mandate, and his success will largely depend on his ability to assemble a coalition of party, police, and government officials to remain in control. Enugu is illustrative of the problems elected officials, particularly those who gained their office through electoral malfeasance, face when they seek independence from their former patrons.

Biographical Note on Governor Sullivan Chime

19. (C) According to his website, Chime was born in June 1959 and is 48 years old. Chime is tall and appears aloof both in his pictures and in person. In fact, the Ebeano2007.com website acknowledges this perceived aloofness but attributes it to Chi being "calculated, smooth, nervy, and persistent." From December 2001 to May 2007 Chime served as Attorney General to former Governor Chimaroke Nnamani, and observers considered Chime as Nnamani's handpicked successor and a relative political novice. The April elections in Enugu were fraught with controversy; believing the PDP had preordained the results, the opposition attempted to halt the transport of voting materials. In most parts of the state no open voting was held, and contacts told Poloff that Ebeano faction members largely did the thumb printing in their own homes. After his inauguration as Governor, Chime criticized Nnamani's performance, noted the decline in Enugu infrastructure, and subsequently broke from Ebeano entirely. While these actions signal a repudiation of Nnamani, this storyline remains unresolved.
MCCONNELL